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REMARKS

ON THE
ITALIAN LANGUAGE

AND
WRITERS.

IN A
LETTER

FROM
M. JOSEPH BARETTI
TO AN

ENGLISH Gentleman at TURIN,
Written in the Year 1751.

LONDON:

Printed in the Year MDCCCLIII.

REMARKS

ON THE

ITALIAN LANGUAGE

W. R. L. D. R.

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REMARKS

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ITALIAN LANGUAGE

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WRITERS.

THE *Italian* tongue, which took its rise a little before *Dante* *, was greatly improved during his time and that of *Boccaccio*, who lived towards the end of the thirteenth century ; at which period it arrived at perfection. It continued so near two centuries, then decayed, and in the last century became corrupted : it was even on the point of being lost ; and, though towards the end of the last age, and the beginning of the present, it recovered a little, yet its decline is still visible, and its total extinction, perhaps not very distant. Some indeed think it is as pure at present as

* In the twelfth century.

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ever : but I am firmly persuaded of the contrary, and will not hesitate to assert, that there are not, at this day, twenty persons in all *Italy* who understand it thoroughly, and can write it correctly.

LET us first consider our earliest Writers in prose and verse, and afterwards proceed to the moderns.

AMONG the ancient prose Writers *Boccacio* carried the *Italian* to a height which, I imagine, can scarce be surpassed. This Writer I would recommend before all others, notwithstanding the criticisms of some ignorant moderns, who think his phrases too far-fetched, and tell us it is no longer customary to place the verb at the end of the sentence. Such as talk in this manner evidently know nothing of the matter. *Boccacio* abounds with beautiful, lively, and natural expressions ; and the disposition of his periods is admirable. He paints the human passions, and whatever comes in his way, with a grace and strength to which no other *Italian* prose writer can pretend. I own that some of his terms are not now to be used : but they are so few, that when you have made a little progress in our language, you will readily avoid them in writing without being told of them. Of *Boccacio's* works, however, you ought only to study the *Decameron*, and the *Laberinto d'Amore*. His other pieces are not written with the same ease or propriety of language, though in all his works there are some excellent things with regard to style.

NEXT

NEXT to *Boccacio* comes *La Casa*, who, I think, lived about two centuries after him. The *Galateo*, and some of his orations, are written with wonderful perspicuity and elegance: and his *Offici communi* are by no means despicable.

IN the novels and prose pieces of *Firenzuola* there is much sweetness and grace. We have not any Author that has equalled his agreeable and beautiful manner: nor is there any *Tuscan* Writer that comes up to his charms of expression, except it be *Benvenuto Celleni* in his own life, which is written with inimitable elegance, and much natural simplicity. Some other pieces of *Celleni* are very good, and deserve to be read more than once.

CARDINAL *Bembo*, and *Sperone Speroni* have also wrote well in prose, and want not their beauties; but, like *Castiglione* in his *Courtier*, they are heavy, and disgust the reader by a certain air of pedantry, which runs through their works.

THE Letters of *Annibal Caro*, and some of his prose satires against *Castelvetro*, are easy and perspicuous; and whoever would write familiarly will not find a better model among the *Tuscans*.

WE have many other good Writers in prose; such as *Bernardo Tasso*, *Il Casca le Varchi*, *Alberto Lollio*, the two *Giraldi*, *Remigio Fiorentino*, and others. But there would be no end of naming them all. I shall only add, that very

few, or rather none of them, come up to the perfection of those I have just mentioned. The two *Villani*, *Machiavel*, *Passavanti*, and *Guicciardini*, are the best.

PET. ARETIN, so famous for his obscenity and insolence, was as ignorant of his own tongue, as of good manners.

WE have also a very great number of old Comedies, wrote with true purity of style : but it would be too tedious to mention them particularly. When you have made yourself master of the Writers I have named, you will be able to form a judgment of them yourself. Let us proceed to the Poets.

OF all our Poetic Writers *Dante* of *Aligheri* is, in my opinion, the greatest. The plot of what he was pleased to call a Comedy, is the grandest that ever entered the thoughts of man. His language is lofty, sublime, and haughty, if I may use that term. Whenever I have occasion to mention *Dante*, I cannot forbear calling him that sprite, or that seraph *Dante*. Never, surely, was a man endued with so great a genius, and such a fruitful invention : this appears chiefly in the divine Poem I am speaking of ; and I am often surpris'd that the *Italians* should presume to write Epic Poems after *Dante*, whose work ought to have struck the greatest of them with astonishment. However, as we have other Epic Poems, it is plain that *Italy* is a Country fertile in the production of extraordinary geniuses, writers of great fire, who were not discouraged, though, to speak in the language of the Poets, they

they saw the first places on *Parnassus* already occupied, but boldly attempted to strike out a path to the summit of the mount.

LUIGGI PULCI, Author of a Poem intitled *Morgant the elder*, is one of those uncommon geniuses, who has seated himself nearest to *Dante* on *Parnassus*. The fluency of *Pulci's* verse, the multiplicity of his images, the variety of his measures, and of his sentiments, sometimes lofty and noble, at other times simple and agreeable, have placed him above all praise. The odd character of his *Margutti*, the *Tent of Luciana*, the *Battle of Roncevaux*, with the *Death of Roland*, are painted so livelily, that I am transported while I read them. In several places, however, he is very careless in the choice of his phrases, which are often coarse and obscure, though less so than *Dante*, who is sometimes very clownish, and even unintelligible, after all the pains of his commentators.

THE *Orlando innamorato* of *Boiardo*, which has been new-moulded and burlesqued by the imitable *Berni*, is travestied in such a pure style, that we have no Poet that writes more agreeably, or better *Italian*. It is, in fact, my favourite Poem. *Berni* may be properly called the eldest son of nature. The admirable harmony and beauty of his versification, his style always equal, always charming, render him much superior, in these respects, to all others. The beginnings of his Cantos, which are chiefly moral, are *Berni* all over; and greatly excel those of *Ariosto*, whatever some may tell us.

AFTER these comes another Epic Poet, a very spirit for imagining things great and uncommon, it is the *Ariosto* just mentioned. If this Poet's genius could have submitted to rules, and he had possessed a more perfect knowledge of the *Italian*, or at least if he had been better acquainted with the purity of the language, he would have been truly an original. The variety of his characters, the frequency of his comparisons, his most lively and natural descriptions, make me consider him as a miraculous Poet: I can think of no other epithet for him so proper. *Rowland grown mad*, and particularly the Canto where he turns raving through a furious jealousy, is the finest, and, at the same time the boldest thing that ever entered the imagination of a Poet. But if *Ariosto* has many admirable and original beauties, he has also several considerable blemishes. I shall enter into no detail of them, but content myself with mentioning one only, namely, his frequent and tedious commendation of his foolish master, who, in return for his divine work, asked him that remarkable silly question, Where he met with so many extravagancies? So many, and so often repeated, praises of the house of *Este*, his patrons, are infinitely distasteful and irksome to a reader. Beside the *Orlando Furioso*, *Ariosto* has written some comedies, satires, and other rhimes: but it is to that Poem alone he owes his fame both in *Italy* and abroad.

TORQUATO TASSO, held in higher esteem by learned men in foreign countries, than by those of his own, was a man of a methodical genius, and copied the *Greeks* and *Romans* very close.

close. He wrote in the manner, in which he supposed *Virgil* would have written, had he lived in his time. His *Jerusalem delivered*, is the last of our Poems that merits any high commendation: for no good Epic Poet has appeared since *Tasso*. The characters in his *Jerusalem*, the sentiments, and the descriptions, are done with great force and propriety; and the admirers of *Homer* and *Virgil* highly commend the admirable unity of his fable, which has recommended his Poem to all the polite nations of *Europe*. I do not think him, however, so much an original as the other Epic Poets I have named, who, though they abound less in beauties in the taste of those of *Homer*, possess many other original ones peculiar to themselves, so truly original, that, I sincerely think they are not inferior, but even excel the greatest of the *Greek* and *Latin* Poets. But of this every one will judge according to his own taste. I return to *Tasso*. His style is not polite, nor harmonious; his numbers want variety, and his thoughts and phrases are too studied and far-fetched; so that whoever would attain the purity of the *Italian* tongue will not find it in his works.

WE have two other Epic Poets, who have acquired a great name in *Italy*. One is *Tassoni*, who wrote the *Secchia rapita*, and the other *Lippi*, Author of the *Malmantile*. The *Secchia rapita* is not well wrote, and though *Tassoni* carried it very high, he was not master of good *Italian*, and was a bad versifier. The *Malmantile* is a heavy *Florentine* composition, a mass of quodlibets, the frequent use of which, in any composition, discovers too much affectation. However, several

veral useful things, with regard to style, may be learned from this Poem, and the voluminous remarks on it by three *Florentines*.

MANY other *Italians* have written Epic Poems : the least known are *Il Girone* by *Allamanni*, the *Amadiggi* of *Bernardo Tasso*, the *Croce riacquistato* of *Bracciolini*, *Il Boemondo*, and *La Granata*, by two Poets whose names I don't remember : but all of them, and several others, scarce deserve to be read ; for notwithstanding what some, who pass for men of learning, may assume to tell us, they are very heavy compositions.

I HAD almost forgot to mention to you another Poem, commended by many *Italians*, and by some foreigners, the *Italia liberata* of *Frisfino*. It must be owned this Poem is not ill wrote : but I could never bear to read three Cantos of it. The blank verse which the author has made use of, is the heaviest thing in the world. For the same reason I never had the patience to read to the end of *Tasso's Week*, nor to finish the translation of the *Æneid* in blank verse by *Annibal Caro*, though it excels the *Italia liberata* and the *Sette giornate*, both in language and versification.

FROM these reflexions on the Epic Poets, you may conceive what a contemptible performance *Voltaire's Essay sur la Poesie Epique* must be, in which he pretends to pass sentence on our Epic Poets, without having the least knowledge of our best Writers, and without even a superficial acquaintance with our language : this wretched judge sets up himself for an Epic Poet ;
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but, compared with *Dante*, and *Pulci*, and several others, he is not worthy to carry their books after them. His *Henriade* is such a poor performance, that it would be the greatest affront to our Epic Writers to name that wretched *French* Poem with their pieces. But it is time to have done with the Epic Poets: let us proceed to those of a different kind.

ONE that I like best is the young *Buonarotti* in his *Zanica*, a rural Comedy, an original in its kind, and containing more poetical beauties, perhaps, than any thing *Italy* has produced: but it requires a perfect knowledge of our language to understand it, notwithstanding the numerous notes of *Salvini*. We have no dramatic piece, whether Tragedy or Comedy, more agreeable to read than the delightful *Zanica*.

I HAVE already said, that there are above a thousand Comedies in *Italian*. Several of the old ones are very good, or rather they are full of beauties. But I could never relish them because they are not written in rhyme: my reasons for this I have given in the Preface to my translation of *Corneille*. I shall not say much of our Tragedies, for, to tell you a secret, I could never read one with pleasure, for the same reason, the want of rhyme, excepting only the *Electra* of Count *Gaspard Goffi*, a *Venetian*. This Writer engaged me to read him, though he writes in blank verse, by the beauty of his language, and the artful disposition and variety of his numbers.

You will hear much commended in *Italy* the Marquis *Maffei's* Tragedies acted at the *Italian* Theatre

Theatre, and his *Merope*; the Tragedies of *Gravina*, and those of *Salio*; the *Ulysses* of *Lazzarini*; and those of *Martelli*, which are wretchedly translated into *French Verse*, and the *Abbé Conti*, with some others not worth mentioning. All these are very dull to read, and still worse to hear from the stage.

I AM sensible, that was I to talk in this manner to the modern *Italians*, much more was I to write so freely. they would be ready to dispatch me to the other world, or at least regard me as a perfect madman. But I speak to a stranger whom I would not deceive: and when you become acquainted with our language, you will judge whether I am in the wrong.

I WOULD not, however, conceal from you, that our ancient Poets have written several Comedies in octaves and triplets, which are not disagreeable, as far as I can judge by some fragments that I have seen. But these Comedies are so scarce, especially those of *Rozzi de Sienne*, which have not been reprinted these two hundred years, that it would be in vain to search for them, or to hope to purchase them for money.

SOME good judges, both *Italians* and *Foreigners*, have liked several of our Pastoral Tragi-Comedies, such as *Tasso's Aminta*, *Guarini's Pastor Fido*, and the *Phyllis de Sciro* by *Buonarelli*; to which may be added the *Alceo* of *P'Ungaro*. But, excepting the *Aminta*, which is diverting enough, the rest are so poor, they are scarcely looked into; and have more panegyrist than readers, particularly the *Pastor Fido*, which
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is a tedious collection of love sentences, full of phrases that belong rather to *Lombardy* and the *Romagna*, than to *Tuscany*. The *Phyllis de Scira*, and the *Alcea*, are perhaps in every respect worse than the *Pastor Fido*.

METASTASIA, who is now alive, has acquired a name by writing Dramatic pieces set to music. This writer is at little pains to draw his characters as they are represented in history; his language is intermixed with *Roman* phrases, and his pieces, in general, filled with incidents very distant from probability: yet, notwithstanding these three great defects, he is read and heard with pleasure and applause, both with music and without, on account of the harmonious flow of his verse, and his many natural and sublime thoughts. His other rhimes, which are not set to music, such as his sonnets, octaves, chapters, and his poems in blank verse, cannot be read without distaste, and seem not to be the productions of that great man.

APOSTOLO ZENO, the predecessor of *Metastasio* at the imperial theatre, published some volumes of tragedies set to music, which in a very short time sunk into oblivion, for want of that agreeable fire which animates the true poet. This always has been, and always will be the fate of mediocrity in poetry, notwithstanding the avarice of publishers and the ignorance of readers.

AFTER the Epic and Tragic Poets come the Lyric; of whom several of *Italy* are carried by many persons as high as the third century. To
speak

speak ingenuously, the poet who writes only Lyric, seems to me to have very little sense. The composing a Sonnet or Cantata, I regard as nothing compared with an Epic Poem, a Tragedy, or a Comedy. For this reason, I am always astonished at the felicity of *Petrarca*, whose Sonnets and Cantatas are much oftener mentioned in conversation and writing, than the performances of our greatest Epic Poets. There is certainly as much difference between the genius of *Dante* and of *Petrarca*, as between the size of an elephant and a fly. Yet the greatest part of those we call poets, or who have a taste for poetry, read *Petrarca*, write of him, praise and imitate him, whilst few look into *Dante*, *Pulci*, or *Berni*. This proceeds from the want of genius in most men, who therefore can have no taste or desire for things that surpass their own imagination; and hence the trifles and little thoughts of *Petrarca* are better suited to the narrow capacities of the generality of readers, than the sublime sentiments of *Dante* and the other Epic Poets, which require an extensive mind to comprehend. I do not know whether I have expressed myself clearly; but this shall be all. *Petrarca*, who has hitherto held the first rank among our Lyric Poets, wrote some Cantatas very beautiful in their kind, but few of his sonnets please me throughout. And as to his *Triumphes*, excepting a few scattered triplets, they are extremely bad, and heavy to read. His language, however, is very pure and good, if we except some obsolete words which he uses.

ALMOST all our writers of the fifteenth century, as we call them, have imitated *Petrarca*:
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and if I find the original deficient in invention, you will easily judge in what esteem I hold the copyists.

LACASA and *Angelo de Constanzo*, who have wrote some few Lyric verses, are not at all Petrarchists, and, like the generality of the Lyric Poets, have some little things that are very agreeable; but when poetry has only the agreeable, and nothing of the great and sublime, it becomes to me intolerable. I repeat it again: I find no great nor lasting pleasure, but in an Epic Poem, a good Tragedy or Comedy.

AMONG the Lyric Poems which have given me some pleasure, I place in the first rank those of our ancient Poets, such as *Dante* the Epic writer; the other *Dante da Maiaro*, *Cino da Pistoia*, in short, all I have met with of that age: for though their language is vulgar, their sentiments are more noble, and both in their thoughts and their expressions they have followed nature more closely than their successors. *Frederic Seghezzi* has collected the Lyrics of twelve of these, and printed them within these two years at *Venice*.

TOWARDS the end of the last century four other Lyric Poets appeared, who made some noise in *Italy*. One was *Chiabrera*, who, I have been told, undertook to imitate *Pindar*; I have met with some who pretended he surpassed him. *Pindar*, if this be true, must be a very indifferent poet. If we except some poems of *Chiabrera* in blank verse, not ill done, the rest will hardly bear to be twice read. He wrote a Poem on the city

city of *Florence* in stanzas of eight lines, which was as soon forgot as printed.

THE second is *Filicaia*, who has here and there some good things; but, altogether, is but little to be esteemed.

THE third is *Alexander Guidi*, who endeavouring to write in the *Hebrew* taste, and the eastern style, got upon his stilts and mounted to the clouds: yet for all the praises bestowed on him without measure, right or wrong, by his great friend the famous *Gravina*, this most sublime *Guidi* is as little known and as seldom named among the poets, as the Tragedies and verses of his panegyrist.

THE fourth and last is *Merozini*, a most wretched versifier, who nauseates me as often as he comes in my way.

WE have many other poets who have written on different subjects; such as *Sannazzaro*, who, besides his Lyric verses much in the manner of *Petrarca*, and some cantos in *Dante's*, wrote the famous *Arcadia*. The eclogues contain many excellent things: but the constraint under which he laid himself to rhyme in that kind of measure the *Italians* call *struccioli*, obliged him to make use of many curtailed *Latin* words; which displease me infinitely.

THERE are several other poets I like much, principally those who wrote, as we commonly say, *alla Bernesca*, that is, in *Berni's* manner; whose burlesque cantos and sonnets are extremely agreeable,

agreeable, and in the purest *Italian*; particularly his *Roland* new-moulded, with which I am much delighted.

LASCA, *Casa*, *Firenzuola*, *Ruspoli*, and many others, have imitated him more or less; and particularly *Feronimo Leopard*; and they have all more or less of beauty and grace.

BURCHIELLO, a barber of *Florence*, wrote prior to all these, in the burlesque taste; and his poems, I mean such as are intelligible, for most of them are not, please me still more than even those of *Berni*, on account of a certain energy of expression peculiar to himself, and rarely to be found in the sonnets and cantos of *Berni*, in all other respects so exquisite.

BELLINZONI, who also wrote burlesque before *Berni*, has many very good things, that deserve to be read again and again: but his sonnets are so scarce, 'tis a hard matter to meet with them.

BUT above all who have written burlesque, Count *Gozzi*, whom I mentioned above, delights me most. If this nobleman ever prints his compositions in prose and verse, many of which I have read in manuscript, they will gain him a very high reputation. He is the only modern poet with whom I am intirely satisfied, both when he writes serious and burlesque. I am infinitely grieved that he does not write always in verse: his great and extensive genius would produce many excellent things in the purest style.

ONE *Vittore Vittori*, a physician of *Mantua*, printed a volume of burlesque verses a few years ago at *Milan*, which I think very good; and when I was lately at *Mantua*, in my return from *Venice*, he told me he intended to reprint them with some additions. I am impatient till it be done, for he is a man of a vast invention, capable, like *Gozzi*, of greater things than chapters and songs. There is much ease in his expression and rhimes, and great beauty in his sentiments and diction: but his too great practice as a physician hinders him from writing much, and from revising what he has wrote.

WHILST I am speaking of our Poets now alive, it comes into my head to mention to you some of those on whom I set the greatest value.

THE Abbé *Jerome Tagliazucchi*, of *Modena*, honorary professor of the *Greek* tongue, of eloquence, and *Italian* poetry in our university of *Turin*, and author of a philosophical treatise on the manner of instructing youth in polite literature, has printed a collection of poems, which are very good in their different kinds.

DOMINIQUE BALESTRIERI, and *Charles Antoine Tanzi*, both of the *Milanese*, are well acquainted with the *Bernisean* taste; but they write little.

JOHN CHARLES PASSERONI, a clergyman of *Nice* in *Provence*, writes the serious in *Petrarca's* manner, and burlesque much in *Berni's* taste; the latter with admirable ease. He has

has begun an entertaining burlesque poem, intitled, *The life of Cicero*, which will be a most agreeable thing, if he lives to finish it, and an original in its kind. But his *Tuscan* style wants a little correction.

ALL the poets of the school of *Bologna* are followers of *Petrarca*, and consequently copyists: the best is *John Peter Zanotti*, who besides several elegant pieces in prose, has printed a collection of songs, two Tragedies in blank verse, and a volume of agreeable pieces, that seem rather the production of a *Lombard* than a native of *Tuscany*.

THERE is one *Leonard Marcellotto* at *Venice*, who, if he would set himself to write, would be little inferior to *Gozzi*.

LOUISA BERGALLI, the wife of this Count *Gozzi*, excels in different manners of writing. In some amorous rhimes addressed to her husband, there is so much ease and simplicity, they must please every one.

I MUST own I have met with no poet in any city of *Italy*, who better understands the adapting verse to music, than some *Venetians*; but they are few and young; I hope they will one day acquire a name by some pieces of poetry: these are *Gionni Marsilio*, *Adamanta Martinelli*, and *Giorgio Breuner*. I am persuaded they will in time distinguish themselves by their poetic writings.

Abbé

Abbé *SINESIO*, at *Turin*, secretary to the Cardinal, would write very well in verse could he apply himself wholly to it. The same might be said of the Count *de Lauriano*, and some other young people : but the worst is, this is not the country for making verses.

AT *Placentia* there is one *Alexander Grazioli*, of *Bologna*, who understands the *Tuscan* language perfectly : but his style is somewhat affected.

I CANNOT recollect any other in all *Italy* worthy to be admitted, I do not say among the poets, but, among those who understand *Tuscan* poetry. The many who mutually extol each other for poets, are lame versifiers, unacquainted with the language : I don't except even the *Florentines* themselves, none of whom, in our day, can prove himself a true and legitimate descendant of those illustrious writers which their ingenious city produced, at one period.

THE Marquis *Maffei*, already mentioned, Father *Zucchi*, who versifies extempore, *Bestelli*, author of the insipid *Gonella*, and the Abbé *Francia*, with all the rest of *Verona*, are cried up for great poets by many who have no taste. For my own part I am certain their poems, already languishing, will not outlive their authors.

THE verses of *Barufaldi*, *Agnelli*, *Borzetti*, and the other poets of *Ferrara*, will likewise be buried on the same day with those who made them.

PAUL ROLLI, who translated the *English Milton*, is another poet who does not even understand the language, as his very foolish notes on *Boccaccio* evidently shew.

As to all the *Arcadians* of *Rome*, it would be a profanation of poetry to name them.

JOHN

JOHN ANTHONY VULPI, at *Padua*, writes some little things in *Italian*; but it is really pity he should write in any language but *Latin*. All the others of *Padua* are true *Arcadian* poets.

THE famous *Muratori* has also been weak enough to write some verses; and, what is still worse, two books in prose; one intitled *Good Taste*, and the other *Of perfect Poetry*. His verses are wretched, his prose good for little, and the subject very ill handled.

THE same may be said of Father *Quadrio's History of Poetry*. This simple priest must needs prattle about poetry, though he was never capable of writing four good lines.

I shall not mention to you Father *Ceva*, a Carmelite of *Turin*; nor his enemy *Blaze Schiavo d'Este*. These, with some of their very ignorant followers on both sides, have poisoned all *Italy* with their books, crammed with folly and impertinences. They disputed about what neither understood, and I believe their quarrel must have lasted till now, had not death snatched away *Ceva* about two years ago. May *Schiavo*, and all the *Italian* pedants and impostors, who serve only to ruin the Bookfellers, take warning before they go after him.

I CAN never forbear laughing when I think of a catalogue which somebody at *Rome* gave an *English* Gentleman of my acquaintance, containing, as he pretended, the best writers both in prose and verse, among whom I found *Marini*, Friar *Cyr of Pers*, *Achillini*, *Giampeli*, *Prete*, *Testi*, *Mene*, *Maggi*, and some others of the same stamp. Never, Sir, entertain a thought of reading any of these miserable butchers of poetry;

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and make it a general rule, to read only those of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth century : as to those of the sixteenth, carefully avoid looking into any of them, not even those who wrote in the end of that century ; such as *Salvini*, *Fagivoli*, *Zappi*, and such like : for though *Salvini* was a man of considerable learning, his style is poor, and his thoughts betray the pedant.

FAGIVOLI is a barren buffoon, who in his burlesque poems strains hard to make you laugh ; but for the most part without success : it is only in his comedies that you meet with a country character perhaps well done. But for *Zappi*, he is a most wretched poet, and has neither invention, sentiment, nor language ; in short, a true *Arcadian* shepherd.

REDI and *Magalotti* alone have wrote tolerably well in prose : but they are both indifferent poets.

CAREFULLY avoid some volumes printed under the title of *Poems by the Arcadians of Rome*. Shun them, Sir, as you would do the plague. They are the productions of those *Arcadians* just mentioned.

HAVING given you a general idea of our poetry and language, it remains that I should say something of the pronunciation. There is a common proverb by which they pretend to teach the true manner of pronouncing our language, *Lingua Toscana in bocca Romana*. Some people are persuaded it is true according to the letter : the language, they say, ought to be *Tuscan*, but the pronunciation that of *Romagna*. The people of *Sienna*, nevertheless, tell us, theirs is the best, and many foreigners are of the same opinion. But the *Florentines* smile at both ; they say that
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the language (which many of them, and not without reason, would have to be called *Florentine*, and not *Tuscan* or *Roman*) ought to be pronounced as the polite and well-bred people of their city speak it. I, for my part, who am neither of *Florence*, *Sienna*, nor *Romagna*, but of a province in *Italy* whose accent differs greatly from all the three, think this article of the pronunciation, is a thing not worth contending about. The point of greatest importance is, to attain to write the language well; and afterwards to learn to speak it with that accent which is most agreeable to the ear of the person who studies it. I frankly own, I like only the *Florentine* accent. The others have something so effeminate and languid, they tire me as much as to hear a *Jew* speak. But, after all, I repeat it again, every one has his peculiar ear, which he ought to consult more than the opinion of others.

From this succinct discourse, too succinct, indeed, for the great number of things to be treated of, had I undertaken to handle the subject in detail, you may see that it is my opinion the fine language of *Tuscany* is fallen from what it was, and that it is at present on the decline. And when I consider how few in our time endeavour to cultivate it, I conjecture that it will soon be intirely changed, and in a little time be wholly lost, unless some *Italian* prince should arise to declare himself its patron, and undertake to make it flourish again: which can scarcely happen whilst things remain on their present footing. What makes the case still worse is: the Gentlemen of *Florence* at this day, for example *Lami*, *Gori*, *Buontelmonti*, *Bonduci*, &c. who ought, above all other to apply themselves to its cultivation

vation, and might do it with least trouble, are precisely those who precipitate its ruin, by employing a number of *Gallicisms*, which have nothing to do with our language.

I SHALL conclude these remarks with the following reflexion : Most of the *Italians* are very excusable for not studying and cultivating their language at present, when there is no longer any Prince in *Italy*, who is a lover or patron of learned men and poets, nor among the Nobles and rich men one who regards learning or the fine arts ; but every one, great and small, openly despises poetry, and treats those who study it or polite literature as fools or madmen. We may therefore look on it as a kind of miracle, to find in *Italy*, thus declining, any tolerable writer, much less a good one ; and if such should be found, men of sense cannot too much praise and applaud his courage, since to become such, he must have laboured and fatigued himself without hope of recompence, and still less of reputation, and must have supported, with the greatest intrepidity, the general contempt, and the silly malevolent criticisms of eminent blockheads.

F I N I S.



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